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ABSTRACT

It has been predicted that, if an androgynous identity represents a higher level of psychosocial functioning, there should be a significant relationship between androgynous sex role identity and high self-esteem. To test this hypothesis, 139 male and female high school seniors completed the Sentence Completion Test of Ego Development, the Bem Sex Role Inventory, and the Rosenberg Self Esteem Inventory. Findings showed that ego functioning and self-esteem were related to sex role identity for girls, but not for boys. Girls' self-esteem correlated with androgynous sex role identity, but masculine, rather than androgynous, sex role identity correlated with ego functioning for girls. The results suggest that self-esteem and ego functioning represent different personality variables in relationship to sex role identity, that male and female adolescents do not construct their sex role identity in comparable ways, and that a wider range of sex role identity and ego functioning measures must be used. (Author/JAC)

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The Relationship of Sex Role Identity to Ego Development and Self Esteem in Adolescence

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In this paper we examine the relationship of sex role identity to self esteem and ego development in adolescence. Three kinds of relationships between sex role orientation and adolescent adjustment have been proposed (Avery, in press): (1) the traditional perspective in which a sex typed, sex-appropriate orientation is thought to represent the healthiest adjustment (e.g., Erikson, 1950; Kagan, 1964; Kohlberg, 1966); (2) a more recent perspective positing that an androgynous sex role orientation including both masculine and feminine characteristics is the healthiest (e.g., Block, 1973; Hefner et al, 1975; Pleck, 1975); and (3) the most recent perspective proposing that masculinity is now the only salient identity in relation to adjustment (Deutch & Gilbert, 1976; Lerner et al, 1981). In this paper we are primarily interested in examining the androgyny hypothesis, as developed by Block (1973).

If indeed the presence of both masculine and feminine self perceptions is viewed as adaptive and representative of high levels of flexibility, there should be strong relationships with other personality features which are also viewed as representing high levels of adaptation or adjustment. In particular, Block (1973) hypothesized an essential

relationship between sex-role identity and ego functioning. She suggested that ego "integration" and sex-role flexibility are comparable adaptations, both demanding a high level of maturity. According to Block, flexibility of sex-role identity could be described as an integration of the traditionally viewed male emphasis on achievement and self-reliance and the female emphasis on nurturance, cooperation and responsibility. Block described this integration as "androgynous", and suggested that it would be manifested as high level ego integration. Using the Loevinger model of ego developmental stages (1976), Block hypothesized that mature ego development and the development of androgynous sex-role identity would be significantly related.

Another personality variable which has been studied in terms of its relationship to sex-role identity is self-esteem. As with ego functioning, one would predict a significant relationship between androgynous sex-role identity and high self-esteem, if an androgynous identity represents higher level psychosocial functioning. Spence and colleagues (1975) reported that an androgynous identity is associated with higher self-esteem than is high masculine/low feminine or high feminine/low masculine identity. In their study using a female sample, Schiff and Koopman (1978) found that androgynous females had higher and self-esteem than feminine or undifferentiated groups (undifferentiated defined as low affirmation of both masculine and feminine items). However, they found no significant difference in self-esteem between high masculine and androgynous women. Kelly and Worell (1977) have interpreted this and other studies (e.g, Bem, 1977) as indicating that self-esteem does not differentiate androgynous from masculine sex-typed males and females, and that high self-esteem appears to be related primarily to

the masculine component. They further suggest that the relationship between sex-role identity and self-esteem needs further examination. Bem's (1977) study of the relationship of sex-role identity to self-esteem, revealed a sex difference in the relationship such that self-esteem was highest in masculine males and androgynous females. This sex difference in the pattern of relationships with the sex role categories is similar to that obtained by Massad (1981) for peer acceptance.

Our study was concerned with how these variables would relate for middle adolescents, given the particular stresses of identity formation and social pressures characteristic of this developmental stage. Our hypotheses were based on Block's prediction that individuals with an androgynous sex-role identity would have higher levels of ego development. While we expected that self-esteem would be similar, previous research has produced varied results.

Methods

Sample

These hypotheses were examined as part of a larger study of cognitive and psychosocial functioning in high school seniors (Petersen & Gitelson, in press). One hundred and thirty-nine male and female seniors were drawn from two suburban Chicago high schools representing a range of socio-economic status from lower middle to upper middle class.

Measures

Ego Functioning. Loevinger's Sentence Completion Test (1970) measuring ego development consists of 36 sentence stems which tap a range of areas including self-concerns, interpersonal interactions and cognitive awareness. The sentences are scored, based on an extensive

manual of examples, according to an ordinal measure of ego levels, ranging from autistic and self-involved to conforming, conscientious, and integrated.

Self-Esteem. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Inventory consists of items which represent positive or negative self-view such as "On the whole I am satisfied with myself".

Sex-Role Identity. The Bem Sex-Role Inventory asks respondents to indicate on a 7-point scale their reaction to how well as set of personality characteristics describes them. The degree of endorsement of masculine and feminine items determines the level of masculinity or femininity. For this study we used a shortened 30-item version of the original test which shows good reliability and validity (Bem, 1981). Sex-typing was used by the median-split technique, in which individuals above the male scale median score and below the female scale median score (high masculine/low feminine) are judged to be masculine. Feminine individuals show the opposite pattern. High feminine/high masculine scorers are androgynous and low feminine/low masculine endorsers are considered undifferentiated.

The data were analyzed separately for boys and girls since previous examinations of these data had revealed quite different patterns in the basic variables -- particularly ego functioning (Hurtig, 1981) and sex role identity (Petersen & Gitelson, in press) -- for boys and girls.

Results

For boys, no main effect for sex-role identity group was found in anovas on either self-esteem or ego functioning. For girls, significant main effects were found for both self-esteem ($F=4.13$, p .009) and ego functioning ($F=4.02$, p .01). Table 1 displays the means for these two

measures by sex and sex role group. For girls, the order of highest ego functioning was: masculine, undifferentiated, feminine, and androgynous. For higher self esteem the order was androgynous, feminine, masculine, and undifferentiated.

Discussion

These finding support the hypothesis that those with an androgynous sex-role identity are highest in self esteem, but only for girls in our sample of adolescents. This indicates that there is a sex difference in the relationship of personality variables to sex-role identity, with males' sex-typing not significantly related to the two variables considered in this study. Girls' sex-typing is also significantly related to ego functioning, but not in the way predicted in our hypothesis. Masculinity, rather than androgyny, was the sex-type showing the highest levels of ego functioning for girls; androgynous girls had the lowest levels of ego functioning although it is important to note that even these girls had higher levels of ego functioning than all but the feminine males.

The results of our study suggest that no consistent generalizations can be made both boys and girls about the correlates of sex-role in the middle adolescent period. Perhaps this is due to the fact that both personality variables are measured by self-report questions which demand a great degree of self-reflection and self-exposure, something that may be more difficult for male respondents. In addition, the sex role measure may not be an adequate indicator of sex role typing in adolescent boys.

In terms of the findings for females, the relationship between self-esteem and androgyny is consistent with that found by Spence and

colleagues, and supports the notion that adolescent females who endorse both assertive and expressive behaviors are able to view themselves more positively, whether because of the flexibility of their response repertoiries, or because there may be more approval in our society of androgynous characteristics for females than males.

Our findings also suggest that there is no uniform relationship between sex-role identity and different personality measures. How can we understand the different findings for self-esteem and ego functioning? Kelly and Worell (1977) suggest that androgyny (i.e., high femininity and high masculinity) represent a conflictual response tendency, resulting in possible adjustment difficulty. These difficulties could be seen as affecting ego functioning which, at least as measured by the Sentence-Completion Test, involves more active, cognitive, interpersonal issues than the more self-focussed self-esteem construct. The different patterns of scores of androgynous girls for self-esteem compared to ego functioning may mean that <u>intrapersonal</u> rather than social <u>interpersonal</u> issues are related to the flexibility of sex-role identity concept. In order to determine to what degree this relationship is specific to this developmental stage of adolescence a replication of this study with different age groups would be of interest.

In summary, our findings are suggestive of the following conclusions: (1) that the relationships of sex role identity to personality variables such as self-esteem and ego functioning are not the same; they represent different constructs in terms of intrapersonal and interpersonal dimensions; (2) that male and female adolescents do not construct their sex-role identity in comparable ways, and that the

factors that go into that construction are different for boys and girls; (3) that further research, using a wider range of variables, is essential to understand not only the differences in how males and females construct their sex-role identity, but also the effects of this identity choice on behavioral issues such as development of relationships, career and marital commitment, choice of sexual object, and other issues of concern in mid and late adolescence.

TABLE 1

Means for Self-Esteem and Ego Functioning by Four Sex-Role Identity Groups

		Undifferentiated	Feminine	Androgynous	Masculine
Ego Functioning	Males	4.52	5.22	4.45	4.42
	Females	6.00	5.57	5.04	6.38
Self-Esteem	Males	3.07	3.36	3.40	3.13
	Females	2.88	2.98	3.32	2.96
n's	Males	23	9	11	24
	Females	17	23	24	8

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